Up-grading in Context

What people in the forest sector
in British Columbia
can do for themselves
about skills development and training

by **Tracy A. Defoe**
Educational Consultant

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Introduction

This report is about finding ways to make it possible for forest sector workers in B.C. to up-grade their skills and make changes in the ways they work.

A new approach to learning and skills development is needed.

I will suggest that we need to re-think assumptions about the people who work in the forest sector, and about what constitutes legitimate, work-related skills training. A new approach to learning and skills development, different from past experience with job specific training is needed.

I will also draw on recent reports on workplace education in Canada and the United States, and show how we can learn from success and failure in other sectors.

Throughout this report I will draw on my own experiences as an educational consultant who has designed and facilitated skills up-grading projects with people in manufacturing, hospitality and health care in B.C.

Since April 1993 I have been working as an independent consultant to a joint union management initiative to enhance people's language and learning skills at a sawmill operation in the Lower Mainland. This current experience in particular, will be used to support my recommendations about how to go about developing a successful approach to training people for the future in the forest sector.

Overview

Resource industries are faced with a dilemma. On the one hand, we hear that the nature of work in these industries is changing, and will continue to change rapidly. On the other hand, it is a commonly held belief that the thousands of people who work in the forests, in fish boats and in mines are unwilling or even unable to learn and change. How then, to deal with changing technologies, changing organizational structures?

They dropped out twenty or thirty years ago, and they are not expected to easily drop back in.

Demographics and economic imperatives add urgency to the situation. It is not feasible, even if it were desirable, to replace all the workers with better educated ones. The workforce of the forest industry today is middle-aged; the same people will be there for the next 20 years unless their jobs disappear.

The threat of massive job loss adds another dimension to the problem. What new opportunities will there be for people with forest sector work experience? How could British Columbians support thousands of unemployed forest workers?

The Forest Sector Strategy Committee (FSSC)[1] is a central part of a process to bring people together to develop a plan for the forest resource

[1] At the time of writing, the Forest Sector Strategy Committee is meeting and planning a workable plan for change. The committee members include representatives from the forest industry, labour, government, first nations, communities, environmental groups, and academia. The members of that committee are the primary audience for this report.

base. The futures of the workers and of their communities are part of that picture.

This entire situation is of vital interest to the people of B.C., and is regularly described in the media and in meeting rooms around the province. The little I have to add to the discussion is in the area of human resource planning, specifically on developing a workable approach to skills development and training.

In adult education, the continued education and training of the existing workforce is a big issue. And the education and training of this segment of the workforce, stereotypically viewed as a middle-aged male blue collar worker with rusty abilities, shaky confidence and an incomplete original education, is one of the toughest challenges. After all, many of these men were failed by the education system. They dropped out twenty or thirty years ago, and they are not expected to easily drop back in.

Getting Past the COFI Study

In 1991, when the JCP Research project titled *A Preliminary Study of Job-Related Communications Skills in British Columbia Sawmills*[2] was in the news, I used to joke that I had a recurring nightmare that someone asked me to fix the forest industry. The report, commonly referred to

[2] **A Preliminary Study of Job-Related Communication Skills in British Columbia Sawmills**, by JCP Research (Emily Goetz, Barry Bent and Steve Sharpe) for COFI and IWA-Canada, May 1991.

as the COFI study because the Council of Forest Industries was one of its sponsors, documented the gap between "reading grade levels of written workplace materials and reading comprehension levels of employees expected to read them." The portrait drawn by the report was very discouraging.

More than half of the sampled mill workers (56% of 227) were found to not be fully functional with the easiest reading passage presented to them, a Grade 4.5 level paragraph about the forest industry. Even more alarming, the study found that it wasn't just immigrants or the oldest or least educated workers who had poor reading skills. Age, language background and limited formal education were not clear predictors of reading comprehension ability.

Further, the surveyed men did not seem to be unhappy. They were satisfied with their jobs and with their incomes. Most had not taken courses to improve their language, reading, writing or math skills: most said they had no need. The majority also said that if they were to take skills training, they'd prefer to do it away from work, independent of their co-workers, and with a teacher from outside the mill staff.

The COFI study focused attention on the "illiterate" sawmill worker.

The results of the study were accepted as valid, and the implication was drawn that there were thousands, maybe tens of thousands of forest sector workers in B.C. who could not handle elementary level reading material. It was shocking to think that an average ten year old had better literacy skills than an average mill worker. The gap between worker skills and industry needs was huge. People shook their

heads and tried to see a way out of the massive training and learning hole the forest sector found itself in – it was overwhelming.

This is what people remember from the COFI study, and this is why I bring it up now. Whatever image forest sector workers in B.C. may have had before 1991, a label from the headlines, *illiterate*, was added to it.

The authors of the COFI study clearly stated that the participants were verbally articulate, and scored within the range of the general population in vocabulary and reasoning. The participants were not "simple," weren't stupid; they had low reading comprehension scores. And by their own estimate, they did not have a need for reading.

Poor readers don't necessarily make poor workers.

On the question of job performance, one clear indicator of a worker's skills and abilities, the authors said they did not know of any correspondence between reading comprehension levels and on-the-job performance. I have heard industry and labour leaders say the same thing, that there is no reason to jump to the conclusion that low reading levels mean poor job performance. If poor readers made for poor workers, there would surely be a large body of evidence, even anecdotal evidence.

I would also like to comment on the conclusions and implications drawn by the COFI study. I believe the authors were right in concluding that with such a varied group of people a single approach would not work, and that using "modes other than reading" for training would be more expedient. This much seems sensible.

Where I take exception to the conclusions is on two points. First, that it is necessary to design training programs around work-related materials, and second, that the industry must decide between job training and general literacy enhancement as objectives before implementing programs.

I would argue that the objectives of work-specific learning and general skills development can, and should be served by every forest sector training program, and that all such programs be designed around the learners, not around work-related material.

What is missing in the portrait of the illiterate forest sector worker is an accounting of their strengths, of what they can do, and how they do learn and adapt to changes. If we are immobilized by a description of poor reading skills and leap to the conclusion that these people are untrainable, or even worse, not worth the effort to up-grade, we miss the opportunity to include the entire workforce on the team that will still be at work a decade from now.

Undeniably, poor reading is an insurmountable handicap in the conventional school system. Book learning depends on reading comprehension. Most of the time at school, writing about a subject area is the accepted way of demonstrating mastery. If we start with the assumption that people have different ways of learning, have strengths in various modes, are more comfortable or more apt to find a way to a new concept through observation or a hands-on experiential style of learning, then we have a

starting off place for planning learning programs that will work for all forest sector workers.

Furthermore, taking the view that literacy, learning, or some definition of "basic skills" can be improved in isolation from the whole person in their whole life is simply not a successful strategy. Attitudes, social contexts, motivation and self-image all come along to the training room. All are factors on the shop floor when information is passed along and when new skills are taught by demonstration, explanation and analogy.

The *Preliminary Study of Job-Related Communications Skills in British Columbia Sawmills* was funded by the Literacy Secretariat of the government of Canada. It came out of the year of literacy when Canadians were trying to get a picture of their reading and writing skills. This study contributed greatly to the account of Canadian reading skills.

It's time to rethink the abilities and image of the average forest sector worker.

My point is that the research question asked about the fit of written workplace materials in sawmills and the reading comprehension skills of the workers there, narrowly focused attention on what workers could not do. Academic research is supposed to be tightly focused, and raise questions for further inquiry. Having identified a skills deficiency, it is now time to turn to strengths. It's time to get past the COFI study, rethink the abilities and image of the average forest sector worker, and get on with training for the future.

Them and Us

Reading and writing are so taken for granted that it is difficult for people who read all the time and write every day to imagine the possibility of living any other way. It is hard not to think that a life without school taught skills would be empty, unsatisfying or just *inferior*. Dividing the world into reading and non-reading camps makes it easier to draw the lines between "us and them."[3]

I think a disdain for workers and their basic skills is dangerous because it allows people to objectify others. When you know someone, or even just acknowledge someone as a whole person, it is much more difficult to de-value his or her worth on the basis of something like reading skills, years at school, or job. It is easier to see the capacities an individual has, rather than the ones he may lack.

I have seen the importance of respecting and valuing people time and again in workplace education programs. Managers and office staff are usually surprised to find their assumptions about the lives and interests of blue collar workers are off the mark. Even a social conversation, person to person, can establish common ground for talking together and make a difference in how each views the other.

In my experience, when workers start taking leadership roles on problem-solving teams, or

[3] Glynda Hull explores this theme, and others, in **Hearing others' voices: a critical assessment of popular views of literacy and work.** National Center for Research in Vocational Education, University of California at Berkeley, November 1991.

making analytical presentations to committees, everybody gets excited. We educators usually get (and take) a lot of the credit. There is talk of "miracles" by managers enthusiastic about the new-found potential of their employees. I sometimes wonder how it is that this potential was untapped before, or why it is such a surprise that people are in general competent and capable of contributing their ideas as well as their labour to an organization. I think it goes back to seeing people who do significantly different work as being significantly different, a sort of division into "us" and "them," perhaps a kind of class distinction. In many cases, though we hate to admit it, racism also shapes our view of others.

We under-estimate the potential of workers if we only look at some of their skills.

I do not mean to suggest that education, background, or even intelligence are not important. I do not mean to suggest that literacy is not significant, that reading is not valuable or that communicating well is not a significant skill. What I do mean to say is each of us is more than the sum of our skills and background. And all the factors in a workplace, all the people and materials and programs interact in complicated ways. We would be deceiving ourselves, and under-estimating workers by a simple analysis on the basis of some of their skills.

In interviewing people at the sawmill, I found that the "us and them" lines were drawn between office and mill, between union and management, between ethnic groups. Even though managers were working from a new, inclusive orientation and workers admitted there

had been many important changes, these were the historic and still significant camps.

In the context of an initiative like a strategy for the forest sector, it seems inevitable that people be seen as part of very large groups. Workers in industrial sub-sectors, for example will almost naturally be grouped together, and their training and retraining will be dealt with as a single issue. I would argue that at the same time, care should be taken to not make decisions that are based on an "us and them" assumption about motivations, abilities or needs. From a sectoral perspective the view is of a workforce that needs up-grading; from the perspective of the individual worker, skills development and up-grading opportunities are very personal issues.

Listening to Workers

If change and skills are on the minds of managers and business analysts, they are also on the minds of workers themselves. From my own experience, I can say that many of the sawmill workers I have interviewed struggle with the image of themselves as big dumb guys, and of their jobs as low status. Here are their words:

> *"Things have improved but what surprises me is that they characterize us as a group. And say, if you've maybe been around in the industry for 30 years, then you're stupid."*

> *"You know, they call us 'dumb fucking mill workers.' I guess after a while you start to think of yourself that way, too."*[4]

The "they" for these respondents are not just the managers and supervisors they know, but includes people in general. It is society's characterization of them.

In interviews at the sawmill, a lack of self-confidence and trust, and a fear of ridicule were identified as barriers to participation in skills up-grading.

> *"Some guys would tease you if they knew you were doing a class."*
>
> *"Now guys like me, we might not be able to learn to use a computer, but for the young ones, sure. I think there'll be a lot of interest."*
>
> *"A college or school might not be comfortable for a lot of guys. Kinda scared to go there."*

For some people, the workplace is not a safe place to be a learner. They are concerned that people might tease them or put them down if they seem vulnerable. Remember the COFI study finding that workers would prefer to take skills training independently, away from work, and with outside instructors? I think this is all part of the same work culture.

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[4] All of the quotations from forest sector workers are from **Basic Skills at NWLD: Report on the SET Needs Assessment for MacMillan Bloedel Limited, New Westminster Lumber Division** by Tracy Defoe and Sue Folinsbee, August 1993. Reprinted here with permission.

Fear is one of the barriers to change, and to learning. It can be partly addressed by making sure learning opportunities are non-threatening and that programs are for everyone, not for people with poor skills. Peer trainers can make participation easier, as can the right professional instructors. Providing options is a good idea. Off site may be the best place for some people, in some situations. With workplace skills development programs, success brings participation. It changes the learning climate.

Other barriers identified in interviews were a lack of time, the shift work schedule, family responsibilities, motivation and cost. I suggest that these same barriers likely exist for workers throughout the industry. Any training plan for forest sector workers will need strategies and approaches to overcome barriers to participation.

Workers have a great deal to say about change.

Sawmill workers I have interviewed have a great deal to say about change. Most of them have been affected by technology changes, and see more coming in the future. They talk about seeing fewer people on the job, about more production and more pressure in a faster paced work environment. They say the workers are better skilled now and more knowledgeable about their work.[5]

Positive changes in management style were highlighted in my interviews. Some workers

[5] People interviewed at Weldwood Squamish as part of a training needs assessment told a similar story in response to questions about the changes brought on by new technologies. Their responses are written up in **Training Needs Assessment and Report for Squamish Lumber Division, Weldwood Canada Limited** prepared by Christina Pikios, Mary Ellen Belfiore and Jas Gill of the Open Learning Agency's Workplace Training Systems, February 1993.

reported that management style changes had led to more involvement by workers, and in workers or groups being more accountable. There was a general acknowledgment of a swing to the better in labour relations, that management and union have improved things in that last few years.

Finally, there is the recognition that the greatest changes may come from the world market forces or other important factors such as wood supply. Many workers I have interviewed believe that the forest industry is threatened, and that conditions outside their control could well put them out of work. Part of their interest and motivation for skills development and training comes from this. As one worker put it:

> *"People are going to want to be able to get a job when they leave this place. We're not going to be here forever."*

The managers and union leaders backing skills development initiatives are trying to make sure that their operations remain viable and that workers remain employed. For them, change, retraining, and skill development approaches that work are part of the plan for survival.

Approaches That Make Sense

One of my purposes in writing this report is to reframe the skills up-grading question for the forest sector. I don't think the fact that most mill workers have great difficulty with reading

comprehension is an insurmountable barrier to the kind of skills development and job training for change that the forest sector needs to address. There are many routes to knowing, many ways in and out of a learning situation.

Let me explain. It makes sense to me that for a workforce training initiative to be successful today, it has to be as much a people program, as a skills program. When you get right down to it, you don't teach skills; you teach people. People learn new skills. And those people are part of organizations. They are in social contexts.

Programs will have to arrive at views of learning and teaching consistent with the kinds of organizational changes envisioned by workers and companies. Program goals and learning objectives should fit their contexts, just as approaches to instruction must fit learners. This makes sense but it is not necessarily what happens in workplace skills programs. It requires, at the outset, accepting new visions of work-related training, broader than the kind of skills up-grading that workers have had the opportunity to do in the past.

It's very important to view every worker as a learner and as a person.

Let me briefly return to my point about the importance of viewing every worker as a learner and as a person. There are problems in the way we talk about education and training for adult workers. This may simply be the result of educators trying to use the language of business to make their concerns acceptable to business leaders and to government funders.

Still, when we start from a discussion of the problem of workers (not us), who lack basic

skills and abilities, who are in a "deficit" position, we then try to develop a course of instruction to raise them to a given standard. This makes it seem possible to identify discreet skills and measure them in a seemingly neutral way, out of their social and cultural contexts. It makes "up-grading" sound like a manufacturing process. It makes "skill development" sound like something you can do *to* another person. That simply isn't so. You do it *with* another person.

This idea of valuing the active participation of the learner is in step with modern management directions, and with many of the changes people would like to see in workplaces. Let me emphasize here the idea that programs can be, and should be for everyone. If there are to be no marginalized workers, there should be full access to workplace education opportunities.

What about the Existing Adult Education System?

It would be great if the colleges and schools around the province could be called on to develop forest sector skills programs to be offered to workers around the province. It would be too good to be true, and I'm afraid, too much to hope for. The existing education system has too much on its plate already.

A forest sector training program, though welcome for its financial resources and for the employment and enrollment it would bring, would be a sideline priority at any institution. I doubt very much that the workers, the companies, or even the educators would be very

happy with the results of a college-led approach in a year or two.

Let us remember who these workers are and how many of them feel about colleges and schools. In the two needs assessments done in B.C. sawmills in 1993 mentioned earlier, it was a toss up between training on or off the worksite. Workers were reluctant to go to a college class or an off site learning centre, and worried about being teased about skills training on the plant.

So far both of the programs that have developed out of those needs assessments have opted for an on site learning centre. The option of off site training is still there in the community for those who prefer it. Neither has ended up partnered with the local college or school board.

It's hard for an institution to be flexible, to find and free up the appropriate faculty members, to work with industry or union on *their* process and *their* priorities.

Even where specialist consultants are dedicated to business development and contract services, there is a large gap to be bridged between the college campus and the forest company.

Most of the time in colleges and schools, teachers work from a set course outline toward an agreed upon course end. Sometimes learning in an institution can be a little like catching a bus. The teacher has the map, the schedule and the route all marked down. The students hang on and complete their assignments to arrive at the agreed upon destination – usually the next

level. It can be a bumpy ride if you are not close to the centre of the learner profile.

In the traditional approach to education and training a curriculum, that is the set of learning objectives for the course, is developed by a group of experts for an imaginary composite learner. Real learners and active teachers are often left off the development team until the course is pilot tested. Of course, good teachers all adapt their instructional strategies to the needs and abilities of their students.

Adult education professionals will all say that they build on the strengths adults bring to a learning situation. Unfortunately, they don't all manage to do it. This may be especially true in cases where the learners' strengths are in skills less familiar to the teaching professional.

Even in learning centres and individualized programs, and there are many effective ones around B.C. with long waiting lists for admission, the instructors are mostly working under assumptions about their roles and goals that stick pretty close to a traditional view. There is a power dynamic that protects the interests of those in control – the educators. Many college instructors oppose peer tutoring for example, because it threatens their job expertise.

Too often, in my opinion, working with business and unions is a money making venture for an institution that is asked to be too many things to too many constituencies.

Organized through a college or other education agency, a skill development program for forest

sector workers could end up making a significant contribution to the administrative and overhead costs of running the institution. I would rather see that money go toward meeting the training needs of workers.

I would caution against entrusting the continuing skill development of forest sector workers to the college system, or to anyone or any one organization.

I would caution against entrusting the continuing skill development of forest sector workers to the college system, or to anyone or any one organization. This is not an issue that can be moved off your desk onto someone else's, though that is usually what people want to do with it. The experts to trust are the managers and union leaders, and the workers themselves. The responsibility and the route to success here will be in the hands of those closest to the front lines.

Seek expertise in instructional methods, in developing approaches and frameworks, in translating what workers and supervisors and managers know into educational events, but don't ask educators to drive the bus. In this case, they might not be able to figure out where you are going or how to get there. And they may run up the mileage on the trip.

Looking Further for Approaches

If they are to facilitate almost any kind of worthwhile sectoral training, education professionals will need to work with others toward new definitions of learning and teaching, and share the power to make curriculum decisions and even the instructional role, with participants.

As obvious as it may be, even specialists in workplace education do not all work from the assumptions that workplace education practice should be consistent with target workplace practices. Many take a narrow view of functional literacy and tie context and course content to an analysis of the smallest reading or writing tasks performed by a worker in a given job.

In a review of about 60 programs funded in 1989 and 1991 by the U.S. Department of Education through the National Workplace Literacy Program, Katherine Schultz makes the point that this approach via a job task analysis or literacy audit, though usually fundable, doesn't make sense in terms of broader goals. Her conclusion:

> *"Reorganized companies are asking workers to become active learners at work and passive students in the classroom. The reorganization of work and workplaces calls for new conceptions of teaching and learning as active, constructive processes rather than the transmission of skills."*[6]

It doesn't make sense to expect the teaching and learning models of the past to best prepare workers for the future. It seems to me that it does make sense to plan skills development around active participation and decision-making, group work and a role for peer leaders and peer trainers if those are the kinds of things you want to encourage people to carry forward to their work life.

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[6] **Training for Basic Skills or Educating Workers?: Changing conceptions of Workplace Education Programs**, by Katherine Shultz, National Centre for Research in Vocational Education, University of California Berkeley, December, 1992.

Two Examples of Sectoral Training

The forest sector is not the first in Canada, nor the first in B.C to look for ways to meet the continued learning and training needs of workers and industry. Others have gone before, and have been innovative and successful. Recent experiences here and elsewhere can point the way to go.

Skillplan

Here in British Columbia, *Skillplan*[7] is an example of a successful sectoral training initiative addressing basic skills needs. *Skillplan* is a joint labour management organization for the construction industry that since 1991 has put in place many diverse projects to respond to the needs of learners – both work-related and personal needs – to the benefit of both employer and employee. *Skillplan* components range from one-day workshops to long term learning opportunities that are planned with the kind of flexibility a construction work season demands. One of the strengths of *Skillplan* is that it really fits the industry, and the worker.

Skillplan operates from the assumption that the more than 45,000 bargaining unit workers are

[7] *Skillplan* is a project of the B.C. Construction Industry Skills Improvement Council. For more information and a publications list contact *Skillplan's* New Westminster office at (604) 526-8020.

highly competent and highly skilled people who need to continuously learn new job skills. Basic skills up-grading, that is improving reading, writing, math, oral communication, even test-taking and study skills, is part of the bigger training picture. Developing and improving these foundations skills helps provide access to further trades training. *Skillplan* programs build on the strengths and knowledge of adult learners.

Finally, *Skillplan* works, in my opinion, because it doesn't seek one solution, or one program for everyone. Jim Lippert, Executive Director of *Skillplan* has often been quoted on this aspect: *"We didn't look for the answer. We tried to find a lot of answers to address a lot of needs."*

Opening Doors

Opening Doors is the title of a training program for automotive parts production workers in Ontario. The joint union management Automotive Parts Sectoral Training Council (APSTC) decided from the beginning to take an innovative approach to workplace training. It has developed three levels of training leading to an Auto Parts Certificate program to be recognized throughout the industry. This is a remarkably different solution to training needs than *Skillplan*. Both programs, however, fit worker and industry needs for a particular sector.

Opening Doors takes place in a manufacturing sector that has considerable interest in effective training for work-related change. New

organizational formats for training have been developed to fit with the changes, and to fit with the workers needs.

A November 1993 consultant's report[8] to explain the APSTC's approach set out these seven main characteristics of that training program.

1. Bi-partite Framework
2. Sectoral Focus
3. Respect
4. Integrated Curriculum
5. Peer Trainers
6. Participatory Format
7. "Opening Doors"

I would like to highlight some aspects in particular that are relevant to the forest sector. The bi-partite framework goes much further than the representatives on the Council. The entire project is a joint production of management and labour and the existence of two perspectives on issues is identified and presented as such within the curriculum. The project belongs to everyone involved and their positions are treated respectfully.

Respect for everyone, and for their ideas, is key.

Respect is made an explicit priority of the program. Respect for participants and the work knowledge they bring to training, respect for the perspectives of employers and workers, respect for process and participation style are all key tenets of the training.

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[8] **Opening Doors... An Approach to Training** by Jeffrey Piker, Kingston, Ontario, November 1993. This report is available from the Automotive Parts Sectoral Training Council, #203- 140 Renfrew Drive, Markham, Ontario L3R 6B3.

The APSTC training is intended to be universally available to volunteers. A wide variety among the trainees is taken as a given in terms of both content and process. The content themes – communication, industry and technology – are integrated, and connected to what trainees already know about their own work, workplaces and sector as a whole. There is an emphasis on awareness and analysis, rather than application.

The participatory format, and the reliance on peer trainers recruited from the ranks of the production workers are important aspects of the APSTC program. Active participation is vital; peer trainers are a part of the message that workers' participation is really valued and respected. The certification aspect is important, but just as important is the commitment to "opening doors" to further personal development.

These characteristics of the APSTC program are not revolutionary in workplace training. They can be found in other programs, and in other sectors. It is the particular combination that distinguishes this project.

The APSTC program is worker to worker training with the sophisticated difference of educational expertise and support, and the respectful presentation of management perspectives and the bigger picture. It is a new program that has not yet completed its three year cycle. I believe that the APSTC program will prove to be effective over the long term if it stays true to its commitment to responding respectfully to real needs, and to honouring the contributions of the participants.

Recommendations for Sectoral Training

What exactly should a forest sector strategy for skills development look like? That will be up to the people who really know the industry, and to the people who know their own needs. This report is subtitled "What people in the forest sector in British Columbia can do for themselves about skills development and training." My message is that a joint union and management sectoral team should take charge of this question, work with educators and trainers, and do it for themselves.

The forest sector does not need *Skillplan* or *Opening Doors*. It needs to take inspiration from the success of the construction and auto parts industries, among others, and invent its own solutions to training needs on its own terms. Where these two programs show the way is in the extent to which they have been innovative and inclusive, and the way they have fit solutions to needs.

In the establishment of workplace education built on these kinds of ideas, process is very important. Since active participation is assumed in planning as well as in learning, people need to understand the goals of training, and the approach so they can make decisions. They need to commit to the success of the endeavour, usually called "buying in." Of course the buy-in is also financial when time and money are committed to training.

How much time the planning process takes depends on the local situation. At both NWLD and Weldwood it took months to develop real trust among the planners, to determine interest and needs, and to commit to a plan of action. This step is vital and cannot be substituted with a top down agreement for skills development and training initiatives. Such a broad agreement is necessary, but it is a starting place only.

People around the province will need to understand, trust and commit to the program.

I cannot imagine that a forest sector skills development and training plan will be successful around B.C. if this kind of process is not followed at each local worksite. The people there will need to understand, trust and commit to the program.

When joint union/management groups sit down around the province to seriously address skill development, they will need help in understanding the parameters of the situation, and to identify their options. From a sectoral perspective, providing for this process either through actual facilitators or through guidelines would be very helpful.

From my experience, and from my understanding of the forest sector, I think the approach taken by the auto parts sector in Ontario may provide a good working model as a starting place.

Some features of that approach like the bi-partite framework and the sectoral focus are perhaps already in place, or being developed as part of the FSSC process. Other aspects such as the participatory format, using peer trainers and

developing an integrated curriculum with a wide definition of work skills and work knowledge seem to make sense as ways to overcome the barriers to training outlined earlier.

It seems to me though, that people will need to be convinced of the value of trying to do all this, and of the possibilities. Trust and respect are key issues that need to be brought forward; accepting that training is for everyone will in itself be a success factor, and I believe will do much to foster trust.

I expect that if local or regional versions of sectoral training programs are encouraged, there will be some differences in the ways the programs are realized around the province. Those differences, no matter whether large or small, will be one indication of success.

I also expect that there will be individuals who re-discover a motivation and opportunity for learning as a result of sectoral training programs. Their needs will be served by complementary projects at the local level, on site or in communities, and by access to the existing up-grading networks.

As a beginning, and as the conclusion for this report, I offer these guidelines which I try to follow in my work. I recommend any skills development and training initiative for forest sector workers follow an approach consistent with the following principles of good practice in workplace education.[9]

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[9] I would like to acknowledge the work of Sue Folinsbee, now national Workplace Consultant for ABC CANADA, in writing her three page listing *of Principles for Good Practice for Workplace Education*, 1992, from which these guidelines have evolved.

Specifically I recommend that programs:

- ◊ be participatory in every sense
- ◊ respect cultural, linguistic and racial diversity
- ◊ build on knowledge & skills people already have
- ◊ offer choices for ways to learn.

Furthermore, the policies and practices of skills development must be consistent with valuing and respecting individual workers and their goals. This means programs:

- ◊ be for everyone
- ◊ accept participants who identify themselves
- ◊ keep individual results confidential
- ◊ open doors, and where possible lead to a credential.

The skill enhancement training project at NWLD has many broadly-based goals, and has followed an open consensus-building process to determine what to do, and how to go about doing it.

The agenda has not been driven by management nor by the union, nor by myself as consultant to the project. In fact, many workers who are not on the organizing committee "own" the project. If this is possible here, it will be possible elsewhere too.

Now is the time for new approaches and new directions for training people in the forest sector.

I have suggested that forest sector workers be viewed from a position of strength and that their skills and work knowledge can provide the basis for up-grading. The goals of skill development can be as broad as the vision for change and as personal as the goals of an individual. It makes sense to me that now, when the rules governing of the forest industry are being revisited, now is the time to consider new directions and new approaches for training the people who work in British Columbia's forest sector.

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